

Appendix D

A Family Guide to the Alternate Assessment In Iowa

This FAQ should be given to families to help them understand the reasons and procedures for the IAA. It is the responsibility of IEP team members to help families understand the importance and relevance of the IAA regarding their child's educational program.

A Family Guide to the Alternate Assessment in Iowa

Background Information

What is the alternate assessment in Iowa?

The primary purpose of the alternate assessment in Iowa is the same as for other assessments—to improve teaching and learning. Most students in Iowa, both with or without disabilities, currently participate in assessment using the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills/Iowa Tests of Educational Development (ITBS/ITED) or other district-wide assessments. The alternate assessment in Iowa is designed to assess a very small number of whose disabilities are so significant that they cannot be accurately assessed using the ITBS/ITED or other district-wide assessments. Iowa’s alternate assessment is not like most tests with which we are familiar. Instead, it is a collection of student work—a portfolio that contains various outlined types of information in reading, math, and science. See **“How is the portfolio organized?”** on page 3.

Why is alternate assessment necessary?

A review of the history of assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities shows many things.

- In the past, students with significant cognitive disabilities did not take part in district-wide assessments because they did not usually learn the same things in the same way and no one was really sure how to assess their progress effectively.
 - As special education professionals began to assess what these students were taught, it became clear that they could learn many things no one ever thought possible.
 - In 1997, the federal government reauthorized the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and required that schools document that they were teaching these students well. The alternate assessment in Iowa meets these federal guidelines, including No Child Left Behind and the Reauthorization of IDEA in 2004.
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Background Information, Continued

How was the alternate assessment in Iowa developed?

Iowa Department of Education staff developed the alternate assessment with guidance from a statewide advisory committee, which included teachers, parents, and administrators. National consultants were also brought in for guidance. Many different types of assessments for this group of students were examined, and the portfolio was selected as the best assessment method. The first use of the alternate assessment in Iowa was in the spring of 2002, which yielded some initial information. After examining the results, refinements to the process continue to result in improved assessment and instruction.

Students Involved In the Alternate Assessment in Iowa

Who should take the alternate assessment in Iowa?

Those who should take the alternate assessment include

- students described as having significant cognitive disabilities in grades 3- 8, and 11 (reading and math content areas) and grades 5, 8, and 11 (science content area).

This population includes

- students who might have difficulty with language, communication, and/or adaptive behavior;
 - students who require intensive, specialized instruction;
 - students for whom paper-and-pencil tests and other, more traditional forms of assessment are not a good measure of their performance level.
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How is the decision made that a student will take the alternate assessment in Iowa?

A student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) team makes the decision as to which form of assessment is appropriate for the student. No one person on the team can make this decision. Instead, the responsibility lies with the entire team. This process is repeated yearly so that as the student changes, so will his or her assessment.

Iowa Alternate Assessment Portfolio

What goes in the portfolio?

The majority of information contained in Iowa alternate assessment is student work gathered by educators. This might include:

- student reading records;
 - math samples;
 - student products or projects;
 - notes from parents, teachers, specialists, and classmates;
 - teacher data including charts and graphs; and
 - other “tests,” which are called performance events.
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How is the portfolio organized?

Information is collected throughout the school year on standards and benchmarks in the subjects of reading, mathematics, and science. The portfolio is then organized according to a system developed in Iowa called Iowa Alternate Assessment Model

- “**Review**” consists of student work samples.
 - “**Observe**” consists of graphed data gathered over time by educators.
 - “**Task**” is a pre-developed activity that demonstrates the student’s application of the learned skill.
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What is the portfolio designed to measure?

Federal government guidelines require states to use the same learning goals to examine how **all** students are progressing in the general curriculum. At first glance, this might seem impossible for some students who had not previously been held to the same learning goals. However, as schools adhere to these guidelines, teachers are finding better and better ways to teach the skills (standards and benchmarks) that schools, districts, and states consider important concepts for all students. This makes us think about students with significant disabilities in new ways and creates higher expectations for what we want them to learn.

Scoring

**Who scores
Iowa
alternate
assessment?**

Near the end of the school year, student portfolios are sent to a scoring site to be scored by trained scorers. The scorers include:

- teachers of students with significant disabilities,
 - other school personnel, and
 - AEA staff.
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**How is Iowa
alternate
assessment
score
determined?**

Each portfolio is scored by two people based on a scoring rubric. If the two scores do not match, then the portfolio is scored by an expert third scorer.

**What is
done with
the score?**

Individual student scores are reported to the schools and districts, where they are used to determine how teaching might be improved. A group of scores, not individual student scores, is reported to the state and federal governments, where they are used to determine how well schools and districts are teaching students with significant disabilities. Scores are **not** used to determine special education eligibility or to evaluate teachers or students.

Supporting Your Child

What can parents do to support the alternate assessment in Iowa?

Parents can be a supportive part of the team by:

- Assisting the IEP team in making the appropriate decision about how their child should participate in assessments. To do this, parents need to understand for whom the alternate assessment in Iowa is designed and whether or not their son or daughter is eligible.
- Assisting the school in teaching their child by:
 - helping to identify what they want the child to learn,
 - making sure their child comes to school ready to learn, and
 - supporting what their child learns at school by carrying those things over at home.
- Asking to see their child's portfolio at conferences.
- Helping their child with learning activities at home, informing the teacher about successes and challenges, and asking what the next step should be.
- Helping their child look at schoolwork and decide the level of success and what needs to be done to improve.
- Being available for interviews the teacher may want to conduct regarding their child's work at home.
- Providing samples to be included in the portfolio.

In summary

Your child's education is as important as that of any other student in Iowa. The alternate assessment in Iowa is a significant tool toward improving learning opportunities. With a strong partnership between the home, the school and the student, we can make sure that Iowa's world-class educational system continues to serve all students!

PERMISSION FOR USE OF STUDENT WORK AND ASSESSMENT

I, _____, the parent/legal guardian of
_____, give my permission to the Iowa
State Department of Education (ISDE) and Inclusive Large Scale Standards and Assessment
(ILSSA) group from the University of Kentucky for the use of any of his/her work and/or other
assessment evidence completed during the course of the school year for educational and training
purposes. These purposes may include but are not limited to:

- Instructional development materials
- Instructional training materials
- Examples of student assessment/work samples
- Assessment training and scoring materials
- Standard setting and other assessment processes

I understand that all identifying information will be removed before such student work and
assessment evidence are used or widely disseminated. In the rare instance that such
work/assessment evidence cannot be altered for confidentiality (videotapes, etc.), ISDE and
ILSSA will contact me for additional permission before it can be used.

(signature)

(date)

(address)

(phone number plus area code)